

SAA Public Education Committee Seeking Public Involvement On Many Fronts

At the first “Save the Past for the Future” conference held in Taos, New Mexico, in 1989, conferees looked from several different perspectives at the problems of archeological site vandalism and looting, and the prospects for site preservation. In the wake of a challenging and intense exchange of ideas produced by the conference, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) considered a variety of strategies to address these issues. One proposal that was enacted, the establishment of a standing committee dedicated to increasing public awareness of and involvement in archeological resource protection, has proved to be more successful than anyone ever imagined.

In five years, the growth of the SAA Public Education Committee, measured in support and products, has been fueled equally by the volunteer efforts of educators, teachers, archeologists, and others and by the needs and interests of a popular audience. Formalized in April 1990, the Committee now includes nearly 50 members from the United States and Canada, who are organized into eight subcommittees and two working groups. Its mission statement is simple: “to promote awareness about and concern for the study of past cultures, and to engage people in the preservation and protection of heritage resources.” Guided by Chair Dr. Edward Friedman and Vice Chair Phyllis Messenger, the Committee is supported by the SAA Executive Board and grants from federal agencies.

From a basic, idealistic set of objectives established at the initial meeting in 1990, the

Public Education Committee has expanded its projects and products as new needs and areas of interest have emerged. A long-range strategic plan adopted in 1992 specified the action items that now command committee members’ attention¹, including precollegiate educational philosophies and strategies; educational materials and resources; involvement in public archeology by professional archeologists, Native Americans, museums, and special interest groups; programming and workshops for teachers, archeologists,

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Museum of Florida
History, Florida
Department of
State Parks.*



and the general public; state archeology or preservation week programs; awards for outstanding public education activities; and a state and provincial archeology education network.

One of the premier efforts of the group is its free, quarterly publication, *Archaeology and Public Education*, which was introduced and mailed to about 400 people shortly after the Committee was convened. Today, the readership exceeds 7,500,

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Archaeological
Resource Centre,
Toronto Board of
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including classroom teachers, educators, archeologists, interpreters, site managers, and others interested or involved in public archeology. The newsletter provides commentary about current issues, innovative projects, conferences, resource materials, educational opportunities, and also includes regular columns about archeology-related activities for the public at museums, sites, and parks. In addition, a four-page, pull-out section called the "Education Station" targets information specifically to precollegiate teachers through lesson plans, program ideas, and other useful material.

Another early Committee initiative was the Education Resource Forum, a traveling exhibit of precollegiate archeology education materials, which debuted in 1991 and which includes books, resource guides, teaching manuals, games, and newsletters and magazines, accompanied by a free, bibliographic listing. Like many of the Committee's projects, the Forum has undergone an evolutionary process in format, although its objectives have remained the same. By making existing resources available for examination at archeological and educational conferences, it is hoped that researchers and teachers will realize not only the extent to which archeology has been incorporated

into teaching strategies, but also that efforts to initiate youth-oriented programs do not have to start from scratch; abundant precedents and models exist. Since its inception, the Resource Forum has been displayed at nearly 20 venues and viewed by an estimated 15,000 people.

When the Forum collection was first exhibited, it included a significant portion of the existing precollegiate educational materials relating to pre-

historic and historical archeology in the Americas. Today, the extent of these resources literally has outgrown the exhibit's capacity, and greater reliance for sharing information is being placed on the Forum bibliographic guide. To make this compendium truly useful, efforts to annotate it are underway through a cooperative venture with the Society for Historical Archaeology's Education Committee and other professional organizations. While almost any educational item encountered or contributed previously was added to the collection, Forum subcommittee members have developed criteria for evaluating materials to ensure that their content

is congruent with archeological stewardship, ethical research, or the goals of the SAA.

The need to evaluate educational resources actually was recognized in 1991 during a special meeting of the Formal Education Subcommittee, which is concerned with the messages, methods, and materials about archeology and culture history that classroom teachers share with their students. At the time, the body of products on the market was not extensive, although meeting participants knew of several in the offing and rightly anticipated a proliferation of items in the next few years. With this in mind, they proposed a set of standards for the development and evaluation of educational materials, suggesting minimum content in three areas: editorial elements, conceptual ideas, and methodological information. After revisions and amendments, a final draft of the guidelines was completed in 1994, with plans to test their effectiveness in the coming year.

The Formal Education Subcommittee has also developed materials for precollegiate instructors. Queries from teachers wishing to use archeology in their classrooms but uncertain about how to proceed prompted the preparation of *Teaching Archaeology. A Sampler for Grades 3 to 12*. This

24-page booklet not only describes the benefits of teaching archeology for educators and students, but it also offers four lesson plans adapted from well-respected teaching manuals. Since its completion in early 1994, nearly 5,000 copies of the free publication have been distributed, and a second printing is underway.

In addition to its publications and Resource Forum, the Committee's proactive efforts to reach the public have emerged in the form of a lecture series and workshops for teachers and archeologists. Since 1991, each annual SAA conference has offered a Saturday symposium for lay people in surrounding communities, featuring lectures on popular topics by noted archeologists. Through advance publicity, which regional newspapers usually accompany with general articles about archeology, these free, public sessions often draw several hundred guests. The local programs also have included essay contests for middle school youths, providing opportunities for teachers to introduce archeology to their students, and for students to reflect on the meaning of cultural resource preservation.

Each annual SAA meeting also features an archeology education workshop, usually about 15 hours long, designed primarily for local teachers,

can turn for advice and assistance in the future. Non-teachers who participate in the workshops benefit by learning basic educational methods that enable them to share archeology effectively with public audiences, especially youths.

The concept of having contacts who are knowledgeable about local resources, sites, and individuals involved in archeology education forms the basis for the Committee's Education Network. A network coordinator has been identified in virtually every state and province; these individuals are responsible for remaining apprised of public archeology efforts in their area. Thus, when a request for information or advice is received by the SAA Executive Office in Washington, DC, or by a Public Education Committee member, the inquiry can be referred to the appropriate network representative. This support system has been particularly effective in linking precollegiate teachers who wish to incorporate archeology into their classrooms to other nearby educators who are already doing so, thereby facilitating the sharing of teaching resources, strategies, and materials. The network coordinators also supply information to news media, archeologists, and others who have questions about public archeology in their area. Moreover, the coordinators

receive frequent communiques from the Network subcommittee chair, and many have developed regional alliances, enhancing their familiarity with education issues and activities across the continent.

The Committee also strives to share information about archeology with less obvious potential audiences through its Special Interest Groups Subcommittee. Many national and local organizations pursue pastimes that place them in contact with archeological resources. By working with nature groups, hunting clubs, and outdoor sport and recreation enthusiasts, subcommittee members hope to teach a broader segment of the general public how to recognize

archeological sites and what to do, or not do, when they are encountered. The first formal effort in this regard occurred last fall, when subcommittee members presented a workshop at the annual meeting of America Outdoors, whose members represent outfitters and trail guides from across the continent.

Yet another target audience of Committee interest is the professional community of archeolo-

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Resource Centre,
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but open as well to anyone whose role requires interaction with the public. By working with teachers, workshop presenters establish a core of local instructors who have been trained in classroom applications of archeology and who can share their knowledge with colleagues. Similarly, because the presentation team usually includes an archeologist or archeology educator based in the area, the teachers acquire a contact to whom they

gists, many of whom remain on the sidelines of public education. The Academic Affairs Subcommittee seeks not only to increase the number of researchers who engage in or assist educational programs, but also to enhance the status of educational activities within academic circles. Subcommittee members would like to see graduate students receive credit for involvement in public archeology, and would like academic departments to add educational projects to teaching, research, and publication commitments when professors are

reviewed for tenure and other professional recognition. To help to promote these positions, the SAA Executive Board has written to the chairs of anthropology and archeology departments across the nation, seeking their support for public archeology initiatives by university staff and students.

The activities and projects described in this article include only a part of the manifold efforts of the Public Education Committee in the past five years. Moreover, they represent only one front on which the Society for American Archaeology has been working to ensure the protection of cultural resources. As a reprise to the SAA-sponsored conference in Taos, a second "Save the Past for the Future" conclave was held in Breckenridge, Colorado, last September to evaluate the success of ongoing strategies and to map a course for the future. Drawing together more than 150 archeologists, educators, resource managers, and law enforcement personnel, the four-day conference focused on three critical areas—public education, law enforcement, and resource management. Within the three workshops, working groups wrestled with specific issues and ultimately developed nearly 70 recommendations for action by the SAA. Participants in the Public Education Workshop addressed concerns relating professional involvement, the Education Network, formal education, and the Education Resource Forum. The latter working group also discussed the feasibility of establishing one or more regionally-based resource centers that would serve as sites for training, research, and public education activities.

The SAA Public Education Committee is not the only national venture dedicated to increasing public awareness of and involvement in archeological resource protection. Other professional societies, federal and state agencies, and private organizations also are partners in this enterprise through their own education committees and programs. However, the SAA Committee is unique in the extent of its activities, the number of participants, and the esprit and sense of purpose shared by its members. Committee volunteers are deeply committed to the idea of sharing the concepts and methods of archeology with lay people, knowing that popular support and understanding not only enhance the well-being of the resource base but also the well-being of the public.

KC Smith is the statewide services supervisor for the Museum of Florida History in Tallahassee. As a member of the SAA Public Education Committee, she serves as co-editor of Archaeology and Public Education and chair of the Education Resource Forum Subcommittee.

SAA Education Committee Resources

The SAA Public Education Committee welcomes requests for information, advice, and materials.

Please contact the following resources.

For information about committee activities:

Dr. Edward Friedman
Bureau of Reclamation
P.O. Box 25007, D-5300
Denver, CO 80225-0007
303-236-1061

To receive committee publications or be added to its mailing list:

Society for American Archaeology
900 Second St., NE, Ste 12
Washington, DC 20002-3557
202-789-8200

To submit material to Archaeology and Public Education:

Phyllis Messenger
Institute for Minnesota Archaeology
3300 University Av., SE, Ste 202
Minneapolis, MN 55414
612-623-0299

For information about the Education Network:

Beverly Mitchum
Bushy Run Battlefield
P.O. Box 468
Harrison City, PA 15636-0468
412-527-5585

For information about the Education Resource Forum:

KC Smith
Museum of Florida History
500 S. Bronough, St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250
904-487-1902